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Vohra, Pragya orcid.org/0000-0002-2515-9398 and Moon, Nicolas (2018) 'Love-sick' Knut : Medieval and Early Modern Commemorations. Scandinavica. pp. 14-38. ISSN 0036-5653

‘Love-sick’ Knut: Medieval and Early Modern Commemorations

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Abstract
King Knut, or Knútr inn ríki, is remembered in medieval English and Norse traditions in interesting and occasionally contradictory ways: as a conqueror of England, and the ‘king of all England’; a descendent of the Danish Skjǫldungr dynasty, but also of Anglo-Saxon royalty; so much so that Norman Cantor dubbed him ‘the most effective king in Anglo-Saxon history’. The ambiguity in the representations and commemorations of Knut in contemporary sources is mirrored in his later afterlife in early modern England. In Anthony Brewer’s play, *The Love-sick King*, Knut appears as both conqueror and English king. Elizabethan and Jacobean engagements with the history of early Britain relate the ambiguity of Knut’s representation to contemporary anxieties regarding English nationhood and royalty after the death of Elizabeth I. This article is a first discussion of ongoing research into the ambiguities in the representations of ‘England’s Viking king’ and the forms of his commemoration.

Keywords
Knut; Brewer; commemoration; memorialisation; medieval kingship; early modern English play

During an official visit to John's College Oxford in 1605, James I was the audience for a short address from three 'Sibyls', whose speech was concerned with extolling his royal lineage. In this address, written in Latin by Matthew Gwynne and printed two years later as part of the printing of Gwynne's academic play *Vertumnus Sive Annus Recurrens*, which was also performed for James during this visit, the three 'Sibyls' praise James as a national unifier, 'whom divided Britain join'st in one!' (Gwynne 1607: 175-185). The purpose of this short address was clearly to legitimise the authority of the Scottish king who had only recently ascended to the throne of England, following the death without an heir of Elizabeth I. Now, according to Gwynne, not only Scotland, but also England and Ireland faithfully serve his royal authority. Even France, somewhat anachronistically, gives 'titles, [and] lands besides' (Gwynne 1607: 175-185), possibly signalling the connection with James' mother Mary, who was briefly Queen of France, before English claims to the French throne were abandoned in all but name by Elizabeth I. In what is clearly an allusion to Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, the 'Sibyls' begin by noting that certain 'fatal sisters' have foretold James' descent from 'Banquo, proud Lochaber's Thane'. Nevertheless, in extolling his royal majesty as a national unifier, the address goes on to compare James with another – rather less expected – royal figure when it claims, 'Thou dost restore the fourfold glory of Canute / Great ancestor, his crowns and royal thrones'(Gwynne 1607: 175-185). The eleventh-century Scandinavian king of England, Knut,[1] is here presented as an exemplar for the kind of monarch which the new king is expected to be. Knut is, not entirely accurately, presented as James's ancestor and James is expected to replicate Knut's Anglo-Danish empire by uniting the kingdoms of the island of Britain. In doing so, this address not only works to legitimise James as an imperial monarch and national unifier for Britain; it also, through its presentation of Knut as an exemplary figure, implicitly performs the same function for Knut. Knut is, in this address, an unambiguously positive figure and also, as the great 'ancestor' for James, an unequivocally British figure. The historical Knut's Anglo-Danish empire is reimagined as James' unified Britain.

In this paper, we are concerned with the manner in which the medieval monarch Knut comes to be remembered and used in early

modern dramatic and rhetorical works, with a specific focus on Anthony Brewer's *The Love-sick King* (1655). There is no doubt that early modern English authors and playwrights drew extensively on historical sources for material and inspiration in order 'to invoke the past to comment on the present' (Kewes 2006: 8). That the past is also somewhat loosely, often even fancifully, invoked is also true of early modern English drama, which was meant primarily 'to teach and delight' (Kewes 2006: 7). There is, therefore, little reason to suppose that the use of the medieval monarch, Knut, in Gwynne address or in Brewer's play is intended to be factual. In fact, the range of unequivocally English or British historical figures who could potentially have stood as exemplary 'ancestors' for the new, not-very-popular, monarch is vast. Why, then, do these performances choose to use the Scandinavian king of England, Knut, to speak to the Scottish and English monarch, James? This article attempts to understand the choice of Knut as an exemplar by looking at the contemporary, eleventh-century memorialisation of Knut. As a foreign king, Knut was a migrant to England, which he chose to make his home. Sources written at the time of his reign and shortly thereafter reveal a dual Anglo-Danish identity for Knut, a recognised feature of the migrant experience (see Hopkins 2011; Simon *et al*. 2013; Bello 2015). As a consequence, the different English and Danish traditions remember Knut differently and it is the role of this ambiguity in remembrance with which we are here concerned.[2]

Knut: The Danish King of England

Knut was a Danish prince who came to England as part of the viking raids of his father, Sveinn, in the early eleventh century. After a series of conflicts with the Anglo-Saxon kings, Æthelred and Edmund, he ascended to the throne of England in 1016, and created a unified Anglo-Danish empire by 1019. He remained in England until his death in 1035 (see Lawson 1993; Bolton 2017). Although there is no direct line of descent connecting the two monarchs as presented in the Sibyls' address, the choice of Knut as an exemplar for James is an intriguing one. Like James, Knut too was a foreign king – an outsider – brought into the line and history of the Anglo-Saxon kings by his own hand, by contemporary chroniclers and also by later commemorators.

Knut's desire to be seen as an English king is evident in his two letters to England sent back on the rare occasions when he was away from the country. The first letter, dated to 1019/1020 (Liebermann 1903-1916: 273-75; Whitelock 1979a), was probably sent from Denmark when Knut returned to his birthplace following the death of his brother, Haraldr II, to stake his claim on the Danish throne (Lawson 1993: 89–95). While it is unlikely that the king wrote this letter himself, despite the first-person voice, it was clearly created under his instruction. In this letter, Cnut appears not as a Scandinavian conqueror but as an English king, ruling by English laws and protecting English people. Significantly, Cnut asserts – among other things – his adherence to Edgar's laws, that is, English laws 'þe ealle men habbað gecoren 7 to gesworen on Oxenaforda' (which all men have chosen and sworn to at Oxford) (Liebermann 1903-1916: 274 [13]).[3] He alludes to an unnamed 'unfirð' (hostility) and 'mara hearm' (greater danger) to the English (presumably from vikings), which he has tackled with his own money and with God's help (Liebermann 1903-1916: 273 [4-5]). The letter refers to Knut and the people of England as a composite, using the pronoun 'we' throughout. Knut further promises to continue his protection of England as long as he has the support of the people. Preserved in the contemporary eleventh-century York Gospels (York, Minster Library Add. 1, fo. 160r–v), the surviving manuscript is annotated in the hand of Archbishop Wulfstan, its probable author (Whitelock 1948, 1955; Kennedy 1983), who most likely also made revisions and additions to the letter (Kennedy 1983: 63; Keynes 1986: 96). The letter contains echoes of earlier law codes, leading Whitelock to suggest that the homilies and the letter were copied when Wulfstan was drafting Knut's laws (1981: 435). The version of the letter surviving in the York Gospels can thus be considered a hybrid text, but one that closely resembled the original (Smith 2008). As an act of memorialization it is a useful contemporary view of the manner in which Knut was – and presumably wanted to be – perceived, irrespective of whether or not it was written in England.

A source that was undoubtedly created in England and that similarly memorialises Knut as an English king is the contemporary *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. The Winchester Manuscript (A) records the

events of 1017 with a rather terse entry: 'Her Cnut wearð gecoran to kinge' (Here Cnut was chosen for king) (Bately 1986: 81; Swanton 1998: 154), suggesting that Knut's ascension to the throne was a choice rather than an imposition or conquest. In his *Chronicle*, John of Worcester adds a further episode of Knut's 'election'. In the aftermath of Æthelred's death in April 1016, while councillors and citizens in London chose Edmund as his heir, 'episcopi, abbates, duces, et quique nobiliores Angliæ, in unum congregati, pari consensu, in dominum, et regem sibi Canutum elegere' (bishops, abbots, ealdormen and all the more important men of England assembled together and unanimously elected Cnut) (Darlington and McGurk 1995 2: 512–18). Not only does this 'election' follow Anglo-Saxon tradition, it also suggests that Knut's mandate to rule over England came from the English themselves (see also Williams 1978: 158-160). The manner in which Knut's reign is here legitimised shifts the presentation of the new king away from the conqueror he undoubtedly was to show him as an insider, chosen by the people of England.

The second of Knut's letters to the English (Liebermann 1903-1916: 276-77; Whitelock 1979b), dated to 1027, was sent following his successful defense of Denmark from a joint Norwegian and Swedish attack, and probably came from Rome during Knut's visit there to attend the coronation of the Holy Roman Emperor, Conrad II. It is preserved only in a Latin translation, presumably from the Old English, in William of Malmesbury's *Gesta regum Anglorum* II.183 (Mynors *et al* 1998–99: 1, 324–30) and in the *Chronicle* of John of Worcester (Darlington and McGurk 1995: 2, 512–18).[4] Both chroniclers record that the letter was delivered to England by Lyfing, abbot of Tavistock, leading Lawson (1993: 64) and Wormald (1999: 348) to suggest that the letter may have been drafted by Lyfing himself. The letter specifically highlights the steps that Knut has taken for the betterment of his subjects: more equal justice and greater security in journeys to Rome; the removal of burdensome tolls for pilgrims and merchants; and the reduction of the fees incumbent upon English archbishops in receiving their pallia in Rome. The last part of the letter emphasises the importance of adhering to the law of the land. Away from England, Knut clearly feels it necessary once again to highlight his commitment to England

as its king. William of Malmesbury represents the letter as evidence of Knut's royal magnanimity and praises his adherence to the laws of earlier English kings.

Like James, who preferred to remain in London after his coronation, Knut chose to settle in his adopted homeland, returning to Denmark, his place of birth and eventually part of his Anglo-Danish empire, on only four occasions after he left in 1016. He consolidated his position by marrying into the Anglo-Saxon royal family through his marriage in 1017 to Æthelred's widow, Emma of Normandy, who played a major role in 'introducing Cnut to the norms of English kingship' (Tyler 2005: 372). Knut reinforced his position as an English king by promulgating laws in the tradition of Anglo-Saxon kings (see Whitelock 1948, 1955; Kennedy 1983). His charters, while signed by both Scandinavian and English earls, are in the English tradition and represent a power balance skewed in favour of the English. The ascendancy of English earls reflected in these charters shows that Knut's most powerful elites were predominantly English (Mack, 1984; Keynes 1994; Bolton 2009). Earl Godwine is an excellent case in point: called 'dux et baiulus' (duke and steward) in the *Vita Ædwardi* (Barlow 1992: 10), he attests all but one of Knut's charters and even travels to Denmark with Knut as an English adviser to the King of Denmark. Further memorialisation of Knut as an English king is reflected through his patronage of the English Church. In one of the few contemporary images of Knut, from c. 1030 in the *Liber Vitae* of the New Minster (British Library, MS Stowe 944 f. 6), the king presents a gold cross while being crowned by an angel. It is not surprising, then, to find historians such as Norman Cantor referring to Knut as 'the most effective king in Anglo-Saxon history' (1995: 166), an English and a Christian king.

Finally, both James and Knut before him give pre-eminence to their adopted lands in proclamations of their kingship. Despite showing clear favouritism to his Scottish nobles, which resulted in disgruntlement in and opposition from the English Parliament, James proclaimed himself 'King of Great Britain and Ireland', highlighting the unified nation almost to the exclusion of his Scottish title. Knut too chose to style himself first and foremost as an English king. In his letter of 1027, he gives primacy to his English kingdom over all others by declaring

himself '~~Cnuto~~ rex totius Anglie et Denemarcie et Norreganorum et partis Suanorum' (king of all England, and of Denmark, and of the Norwegians, and of part of the Swedes) (Liebermann 1903-1916: 276-77; Whitelock 1979).

The memorialisation of Knut as an English monarch is different to the manner in which he is commemorated in the Scandinavian tradition. Composed within living memory of the events described, performed in his presence and therefore ostensibly with his approval, the poetry of Knut's skalds provides us with both contemporary memory as well as an insight into the process of memorialisation. *Drápur* (long praise-poems with refrains) such as Sigvatr Þórðarson's *Knútsdrápa*, Óttarr svarti's *Knútsdrápa*, Hallvarðr háreksblesi's *Knútsdrápa*, Þórðr Kolbeinsson's *Eiríksdrápa* and other skaldic poems record Knut's reign and also memorialise the king for posterity. Although these poems survive only in later manuscripts, they are reliably dated to the reign of Knut and were composed, in the words of Frank, 'for a Norse-speaking community enisled in a sea of Anglophones'(1994: 108).

The contemporary Scandinavian tradition created by these skalds remembers Knut as a markedly Scandinavian king. Various elements used by the skalds in the *Knútsdrápur* highlight Knut's 'Scandinavian-ness'. They refer to his connections with Denmark or Jutland, using labels such as 'Jóta dróttinn' (lord of the Jutes) (Óttarr) (Townend 2012b: 771). They emphasise his ancestry, referring to his father, Sveinn – 'enn snjalli Sveins mǫgr' (the bold son of Sveinn) (Óttarr) (Townend 2012: 774b) – and call him 'Skjǫldungr' (Scylding) (Þórðr) (Carroll 2012: 507), tying him to the ancient Scandinavian dynasty which nevertheless also had deep English connections. Even *Liðsmannaflokkr*, which is addressed more directly to Knut's followers than to the king himself and is evidently situated in England, focusses on the triumph of the Scandinavians over the English. Townend argues persuasively for situating Knut-related skaldic production not just in England in general, but in particular in Winchester, Knut's capital and main city (2001). In his *lausavísa* (occasional or 'loose' verse), Óttarr svarti refers to Knut as 'konungr Dana, Íra ok Engla ok Eybúa' (King of the Danes, the Irish, the English and the Island-dwellers) (Townend 2012a: 786), reversing the order found in Knut's 1027 letter and giving primacy to

his Scandinavian homeland among all his dominions. The Knut of his skalds' vision – sanctioned by the king himself (Frank 1994: 108) – is a Scandinavian king and, above all, a conqueror. Assuming a locus of production and first performance in England, and considering the contemporary oral circulation of these poems, it may even be possible to suggest that the 'Scandinavian-ness' – the Scandinavian emphasis – of the skaldic verse was designed to reassure Knut's Danish subjects of his attention and to reassert his dominion from afar. Considering he only went to Scandinavia a handful of times and usually only when there was trouble, the propagandist elements of praise poetry could have proved a useful tool for the monarch from across the sea. Sven Aggesen's later *Historia brevis regum Dacie* similarly celebrates ~~C~~nut's imperium, once again highlighting his conquests and comparing him ~~to~~ 'par Alexandro' (the great Alexander) (Christiansen 1992: 32 n. 13).

English and Scandinavian traditions thus remember and memorialise Knut in occasionally contradictory ways. Knut is presented as belonging to both England and Denmark. The virtuous Christian monarch of the English tradition, however, is contrasted with the conquering warrior of the Scandinavian tradition. The preservation in the sources of Knut's dual identity, split between England and Scandinavia, is not surprising given that he was a migrant to his English homeland. Dual identity is defined as the 'identification with both the… ethnocultural (minority) in-group and the society of residence' (Simon et al 2013) and is recognised as a common feature of the migrant experience. According to Bello, '[d]ifferent disciplinary studies have demonstrated that those who are able to manage the mechanisms embedded in the formation of dual identity more successfully also experience less cultural discomfort and, consequently, show better patterns of integration in host societies' (2014:213). Knut's negotiation of his dual identity was evidently successful in that he was able to maintain his power, as well as his socio-cultural links, in both Denmark and England. However, it is precisely this dual identity which feeds the ambiguity of his memorialisation as neither wholly Scandinavian nor entirely English.

This ambiguity in the representation and commemoration of Knut in contemporary medieval sources is mirrored in his later afterlife in early modern England. While it is unlikely that Matthew Gwynne was

concerned with constructing a detailed parallel between the medieval king Knut and the early modern monarch James, in early modern literature the ambiguous representation of Knut makes him a useful metaphor for the fluid identity politics of early modern English royalty after the death of Elizabeth I. While it is clear that, in *The Love-sick King*, Brewer has drawn upon some chronicle sources such as John Speed's 1611 *The History of the Emppire of Great Britaine* (see further Martin 1991), it is as yet unclear how far the material available to Brewer owes a genuine debt to eleventh-century medieval sources of either the English or Scandinavian traditions. Furthermore, given the manner in which early modern plays employed the past, it is perhaps not surprising that such links are hard to find.

Performing Kingship on the Early Modern Stage

Whereas Gwynne's address in 1605 uses Knut as an exemplary figure, portraying him as the virtuous English king, the representation of England's Danish king on the contemporary Elizabethan and Jacobean stage is considerably more in line with the medieval Scandinavian tradition of the conqueror, but depicted instead from the perspective of the conquered. In both the anonymous *Edmund Ironside* (c. 1595) and in Anthony Brewer's *The Love-sick King* (c. 1617, first printed in 1655) Knut is depicted unambiguously as a foreign invader.[5] Recent work on both plays has focussed on their engagement – however fancifully in the case of Brewer's work – with the colonisation of early Britain in the pre-Conquest, Anglo-Saxon period, and also with the way in which such material is adapted to concerns about contemporary constructions of English nationhood (see Champion 1988; Scragg 2000; McMullan 2007; Perry 2009).

Both plays exhibit considerable anxiety over the fact that the historical Knut ruled as a king of England, 'animated by tension between the idea of conquest as a rupture that threatens to undo native character and the idea of incorporation…the absorption of Canute into the English institution of monarchy' (Perry 2009: 182). In the case of *Edmund Ironside* this 'tension' is concerned with the succession crisis over Elizabeth's likely successor, and the thoughts this provoked about competing claims to royal authority: the play stages a similar

conflict between competing kings with rival claims resting on conquest (Knut) or royal blood (Edmund). Near the beginning of the play, Knut contrasts his own claim, achieved through 'my father's conquest' (I.i: line 8) and publicly proclaimed 'throughout this little world' (I.i: line 11) against Edmund's 'private coronation' (I.i: line 17). This is similar to the competing versions of 'election' and 'conquest' presented in the medieval sources above.

Whereas *Edmund Ironside* achieves reasonable fidelity to its chronicle source in providing a narrative of the wars between Edmund and Knut following the death of Æthelred in 1016, *The Love-sick King* is most striking for just how cavalierly it treats the historical events of Knut's reign and wars with the English, unashamedly fictionalising the history it presents to its audience. The history of different centuries is conflated so that Knut is opposed not by Edmund but by the much earlier King Alfred, here called Alured. This mixing up of historical figures from the ninth and eleventh centuries works in the play to reinforce Knut's status as just another viking. He is, as he clearly identifies himself at the opening of the play's final scene, 'the *Danish* king' (V.ii: line 2; emphasis original).

The play opens with the sacking of Winchester by Knut, during which Æthelred dies, and in which Knut also encounters the 'fair English nun' Cartesmunda, with whom he falls instantly in love. Much to his own astonishment, Knut finds himself unable to kill Cartesmunda along with her fellow nuns, and instantly halts the sacking of the city. Meanwhile, a disguised Alfred meets Elgina, Knut's fictional sister, who is instrumental in having him set free from his Danish captors, and the two subsequently fall in love as well. Ultimately, both women die in parallel scenarios: Elgina inadvertently comes between the weapons of Alfred and Erkinwald, a Danish lord who is jealous of her love, while Cartesmunda is accidentally stabbed by her erstwhile lover Knut when she is threatened by another of his Danish lords, Huldrick. Alfred then defeats Knut with the aid of his fearsome allies: the invading armies of the Scottish king and the colliers of Newcastle. Thereupon, in recognition of the love he had for Elgina, Alfred grants the defeated Knut a stay of execution and declares that the English and Danish can be friends, provided the latter cease to expect tribute. In this way,

the historical negotiated peace between Knut and Edmund Ironside is reimagined as an act of magnanimity on the part of a victorious King ~~Alfred~~.[6]

The colliers, led by the stock character Grim,[7] enter the play's action as part of a comic subplot concerning the success of a Newcastle merchant, Thornton. Based on the life of the fifteenth-century Roger de Thornton, this subplot owes more to the legendary tales of Dick Whittington or to the similar character of Simon Eyre in Thomas Dekker's *Shoemaker's Holiday* than to historical accounts, with Thornton quickly rising from poverty to become Mayor of Newcastle and marrying a rich widow. He not only supplies ~~solders~~ and money to ~~Alfred~~, but also reinforces Newcastle with walls that are extravagantly claimed to be 'full a hundred foot' (III.iii, line 40) high, and 'twelve in breadth' (III.iii, line 40). The presence of this semi-legendary, fifteenth-century figure inserted into the action purportedly taking place centuries earlier is entirely in keeping with the manner in which *The Love-sick King* jumbles historical and fictional material. The focus on Newcastle is possibly owing to the play's first performance there (Martin 1991:200) rather than intrinsically driving the plot.

~~Alfred~~ explicitly states that his military aim is to 'once again make England singular / Free in herself and Princes' (IV.iii, lines 112-113). He finishes the play victorious, proclaiming that, '[t]he sea binds us in one continent / Doth teach us to embrace two hearts in one, / To strengthen both 'gainst all invasion' (V.ii, lines 127-129). In ~~Alfred's~~ assertion that the sea protects Britain against invasion, we may read another medieval echo: the voice of Alcuin of York lamenting the viking raid on Lindisfarne in 793. Alcuin deems the viking attacks unexpected precisely because the sea was thought to be protection: 'nec eiusmodi navigium fieri posse putabatur' (nor was it thought that such an inroad from the sea could be made) (Dümmler 1895:42; Whitelock 1979c). The image of 'two hearts in one' (V.ii, line 128) is also clearly meant to address to contemporary concerns about England and Scotland being united under the reign of James. Opposed to Knut, here it is Alfred who is presented as the model for how a king should act in a properly martial manner, maintaining the national borders.

Ironically, much of *The Love-sick King* works to undermine this

notion of a stable, singular nation. Thornton and his fellow Newcastle merchants and colliers express both commercial and nationalist rivalry with Croydon and the South more generally, the area perceived to have sided with the Danes while they have remained loyal to the English king. Confined to the status of comic subplot, the fictional space they occupy is also inconsistent with the action that takes place elsewhere in the play. At one point, the Danish lord Harold informs ~~Knut~~, that '[t]he Garrisons that kept Northumberland / Are chased as far as York' (III.ii, lines 44-45), but the Newcastle characters appear wholly unaware of a conflict in which apparently 'two thousand Danes / Died in… bloody slaughter'(III.ii, lines 45-46), despite its presumed geographical proximity.

Most strikingly, when confronting the Danish captors of ~~Alfred~~, the Danish Elgina powerfully asserts her status as an English princess:

> If all the *English* perish, then must I,
> For I (now know) in *England* here was bred,
> Although descended of the *Danish* blood,
> King *Hardiknut* my father, thirty years
> Governed the one half of this famous kingdom,
> Where I, that time was born an *English* princess. (I.iii, lines 242-247, emphasis original)

Clearly, this is another example of Brewer's distortion of the facts of history, confusing Knut's son, Harthacnut, with his father, and exaggerating the length of Harthacnut's reign. Brewer appears to enjoy exaggerating his facts; ~~Alfred~~ will later complain that Danegeld has been collected for '[a]n hundred thirteen years' (V.i, line 11), suggesting that Æthelred must have had a considerably longer reign than most conventional histories would have us believe. This speech also undermines any clear division between English and Dane which the play is elsewhere attempting to construct. Unlike Knut's skalds, who construct Knut's identity based on inheritance and ancestry, Elgina powerfully asserts that national identity rests instead on a sense of place and community based on her upbringing. It may even be possible to see, in the name of Canutus' sister Elgina, a corruption of the names

of the historical Knut's English wives, Ælfgifu of Northampton and Ælfgifu, the Anglo-Saxon name of Emma of Normandy. If this is the case, Elgina's self-identification as English is perhaps an echo of an historical memory, much distorted.[8]

Perry has observed that the word 'conquest' appears with a 'near-comic frequency' whenever Knut is on stage, as though to underline his status as a foreign, Danish invader (2009: 191). Yet, following the opening scenes of the sacking of Winchester, the success of which is clearly ascribed to the treachery of the English 'Osbert duke of Mer[c]ia', the play never actually shows Knut achieving success in battle. Despite greater fidelity to its chronicle sources, much the same is seen in *Edmund Ironside*, where Knut's success in battle is owing to the treachery of the villainous English lord, Edricus. Although his characterisation is largely consistent with Holinshed's depiction of his basis, Edricke (1577: 259), the presence of Edricus means that Knut is never shown achieving military victory over the English through his own abilities; instead, he relies on the English troops under his command, as they are superior to his Danish forces. Following the defeat of his forces at Worcester, Knut voices the complaint:

> Is't not a dishonour to you
> to see a foreign nation fight for me
> whenas my home-bred countrymen do run
> leaving their king amongst his enemies? (III.v, lines 44-48)

Scragg has suggested that it is a sign of Knut's 'clarity of judgement' that he is fully aware of Edricus' nature as a traitor and 'all-soothing sycophant', whilst Edmund is repeatedly deceived by him, even after he has recognised Edricus' treachery (2000: 101). However, this also underlines how Knut is unable to achieve victory except through underhanded means; this renders him, according to the play, unworthy to be a properly martial ruler, whereas Edmund is consistently shown to be conscious of his duty and responsibility towards his followers.

In *The Love-sick King*, Knut is largely concerned with pursuing the unwilling Cartesmunda until she finally relents. This pursuit and eventual consummation of his desire is explicitly opposed by his

Danish lords with the proper duties of kingship:

> All England sure, I think will mutiny,
> If thus the King neglect his hopeful Conquest,
> By doating on a womans lustful Beauty. (II.iii, lines 2-4)

~~Knut~~, on the other hand, repeatedly elides his winning of Cartesmunda with the successful conquest of England:

> England shall sleep in peace, for all my force
> On Cartesmunda's love shall now be spent,
> Thy Arms shall be my Arms, thy Bed my Tent. (II.iv, lines 46-48)

> …In thee we have all good that England holds,
> All Conquest in these Arms Canutus holds. (II.iv, lines 56-57)

The self-deluding nature of his rhetoric is forcefully underlined, though, by the extent of the king's distraction with Cartesmunda. As ~~Knut~~ is busy articulating his love for her, and as she finally relents to his desire, the king is also ignoring the attempts by one of his lords to inform him of the death of his sister Elgina; he is apparently oblivious to what is being said to him. ~~Knut's~~ love for Cartesmunda thus renders him unfit for the proper duties of a king and reveals him to be lacking in the martial virtues associated with kingship.

The historical Knut never did fall helplessly in love with a nun with the rather fanciful name of Cartesmunda. Brewer actually takes this story from another source entirely: it is an Anglicised version of the story of Mahomet and the fair Irene, in which the Turkish Sultan comes across a holy maid during the sack of Constantinople, whereupon he immediately halts the violence. The story could have been known to Brewer through the now-lost dramatic version, *The Turkish Mahomet and Hiren the Fair Greek* (c. 1594-5), written by George Peele, but it certainly derives from both Richard Knolles' *Generall Historie of the Turke* (1603) and from William Barksted's narrative poem *Hiren, or the fair Greeke* (1611), with which it shares verbal parallels (Dent 1961). The purpose of associating Knut with a story which at least some of

the audience was likely to recognise as being that of a completely different historical figure is surely to underline Knut's foreignness. In this reading, Knut is both Dane and Turk, inescapably 'other' and foreign to the English nation.

Brewer also alters the ending of the story he has appropriated. Whereas Mahomet is ultimately able to reassert his masculine self-control by murdering Irene and continuing with his martial conquest, in *The Love-sick King* ~~Knut~~ accidentally kills Cartesmunda as he attempts to come to her defence; he then loses his subsequent battle with the English. The exemplary figure of Matthew Gwynne's earlier address has become precisely the opposite: a dissolute, unmanly figure who is only able to succeed in his conquest through treachery, and is ultimately undone by love.

Despite the fact that the story of love-sick Knut is obviously fictional, by the beginning of the eighteenth century it appears to have been taken seriously by a number of writers, all of whom repeated the rather extraordinary claim that the tomb of Cartesmunda was actually sited on the Isle of Man. The earliest example of this appears in 1731 in George Waldron's *Description of the Isle of Mann*:

> I am entirely of the opinion that Cartesmunda, the fair nun of Winchester, who fled from the violence threatened her by king John, took refuge in this monastery, and was here buried; because there is very plainly to be read
>
> *Cartesmunda Virgo immaculata.*
> …and on the base the date is yet perfectly fresh.
> *Anno Dommini* 1230. (1744:88)

This claim is repeated by later writers almost word for word well into the middle of the nineteenth century, when it appears in Joseph Train's *An Historical and Statistical Account of the Isle of Man* (1845). Knut appears to have been forgotten by this point, replaced with the traditional bogeyman of English monarchical history, King John. However, the phrasing of Waldron's claim suggests that he expects the story of Cartesmunda to be well known to the audience of his history, despite the fact that the only previous printed reference to

Cartsemunda appears to be in Brewer's play, first printed in 1655. Whether there ever was a Cartesmunda connected with King John, as claimed by these sources, and therefore misused by Brewer, is not presently known but is a question worth asking.

Conclusion

The Love-sick King presents its audience with contrasting models of kingship, embodied in opposing English and Danish monarchs. With his concern to represent an ideal of kingship, one which is appropriate to early-seventeenth-century concerns about James I, Anthony Brewer provides his audience with a model king in the figure of Alured/Alfred. The heroic and noble king of Brewer's play is similar to the figure of Knut in Matthew Gwynne's address. This lends credence to the idea that the play may have been presented at – even written specifically for — James' visit to Newcastle in 1617 (see further Martin 1991). Additionally, the choice of Knut, a Danish and therefore foreign-born, king of England, may have been an allusion to aspects of James' own Scandinavian lineage through his mother, Mary Queen of Scots, great-granddaughter of James IV and Margaret of Denmark, as well as to James' Danish connection in his wife, Anne of Denmark.[9]

Both Brewer and Gwynne are able to use the figure of Knut as a blank canvas for their representation of ideals and otherness. Where required, Knut is the foreign invader, slightly inept, but still dangerous; elsewhere, he is the exemplar of unification and empire-building to be emulated. The dual identity of the historical Knut, divided between England and Scandinavia, and the ambiguity this imbued in his memorialisation sets the stage for his early modern appropriation. In the early modern period, Knut both provides access for a foreigner into the English royal line and also stands as an example of the benevolent conqueror, ultimately absorbed into the English nation. Thanks to his ambiguous English-Danish identity, Knut was a figure onto whom contemporary concerns could be easily projected, depending on the most immediate anxieties, in order to argue for what an ideal king was: kingship was a unifying quality, uniting the nation and establishing an empire. Thus James, the Scottish king who became King of England, could plausibly be counselled to emulate the manner

in which Knut negotiated his own dual identity. That the real, historical Knut becomes somewhat lost in this mass of conflicting associations in the early modern plays – even finally effaced altogether, as the story of Cartesmunda becomes associated by later authors with a different king – is a tribute to the fact that he was already an ambiguous figure in earlier medieval commemoration. The fluid and ambiguous identities articulated in medieval representations of Knut, depending on circumstance and agenda, lend themselves to the creation of the king in later, early modern memorialisation as an empty vessel to be imbued with characteristics and words as required by his authors.

Endnotes

1 This article uses the name form Knut as a compromise between the Anglicised form 'Canute/Cnut' and the Old Norse form 'Knútr' in an effort to negotiate between the two linguistic traditions of the sources being used, without giving primacy to either tradition. Where the name appears in direct quotations from sources, the source form is retained.

2 This article has grown out of research first presented at 'Æthelred II and Cnut the Great: A Millennial Conference to Commemorate the Siege of London in 1016' on 6-9 July 2016, University College London and University of Winchester. We are grateful to the organisers for allowing us the opportunity to give this ongoing research its first outing, to the audience for valuable feedback and to our reviewers for their constructive and encouraging remarks.

3 This Oxford meeting in 1018 and its implications have generated considerable scholarly discussion (see Whitelock 1948, 1955; Kennedy 1983). The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, Manuscript D f. 68v attests to a meeting in 1018 where 'Dene 7 Engle wurdon sammæle æt Oxanaforda to Eadgares lage' (At Oxford Danes and English were agreed on Edgar's law) (Cubbin 1996: 63; Swanton 1998:154). Knut's letter is clearly making a reference to this accord.

4 Both chroniclers date the letter to 1030, but Whitelock has convincingly argued for a 1027 date (1981: 507).

5 All line numbers for quotations from the plays refer to the edition by R. Martin (ed.) (1991), *Edmond Ironside: And, Anthony Brewer's The Love-sick King,* New York: Garland

6 This 'magnanimous' truce probably also owes something to the famous

treaty between Alfred and Guthrum, the Danish earl, which resulted in the creation of the Danelaw. Brewer is, once again, conflating two historical events from the first and second Viking Ages in Britain.

7 Brewer has here, intentionally or otherwise, used a character of early modern popular culture and folklore who bears a name of Scandinavian origin.

8 Our thanks to our reviewer for alerting us to this thought-provoking possibility.

9 Although Anne belonged to the line of Danish royalty, she had no genealogical links with the line of Knut.

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